

South Yakima Conservation District

Most Significant Natural Resource Accomplishment

The water in the Yakima River near Benton City was extremely clear from late May through July 2005. (By "extremely clear" we mean at or near 0 Nephelometric Turbidity Units based on 15 - minute increment continuous data). While some of this clarity was likely due to the abundant aquatic plants in the lower river, even readings upstream of the aquatic plants show long periods of low turbidity. This is an impressive accomplishment downstream of 360,000 acres of irrigated agriculture but it did not come easily or quickly. Diverse agencies and hundreds of private landowners invested considerable effort and millions of dollars in irrigation improvements over many years to see the improved water clarity.



Mission of the South Yakima Conservation District

The primary goal of the South Yakima Conservation District is to promote the wise use, development, and conservation of our renewable natural resources.

Water Quality Implementation

The Water Quality Implementation Grant has always been successful in our district. We provide 100% of the grant dollars to cost-share and use existing grants for education, outreach, and technical assistance. This allows us to get more conservation on the ground.

Our Conservation Commission Tour showed the success we have with implementing BMP's with our smaller acreage producers. Our priority BMP's are upgrading irrigation systems, tailwater recovery systems, improving pastures through re-seeding, cross-fencing, and/or aeration, and installation of soil moisture sensors and meters. A lot of conservation "BANG" for the bucks.

Basic Funding

Basic funding is used to provide training for staff that is not covered by grants. It also helps to pay for wages for non-grant employees.

Local Funding

Local assessment is used for district overhead and to cover costs not allowed by grants. These funds also are used for any grants that demand a percentage cash match.

Professional Engineering

The most significant on the landscape accomplishment in the South Central Professional Engineering cluster (Underwood, South Yakima, North Yakima, Benton, Franklin, Othello, Warden, Moses Lake, and Upper Grant CDs) was the implementation of 40 BMPs: 24 Livestock BMPs (nutrient management on dairies and some feed lots)
16 Irrigation improvement BMPs (conversions to more efficient methods)
16 of the above 40 BMPs were on operations meeting the definition of a "small farm"
A total of 41 landowners received some type of technical engineering assistance that may or may not have included these BMPs. Over 3500 acres were directly impacted from a conservation standpoint by the implementation of these BMPs. The actual total number of acres benefited by the implementation of these BMPs is difficult to gage. There is an obvious benefit from BMPs on livestock operations (such as lined waste storage ponds, settling basins, concrete manure storage structures, berms, diversions, terraces, etc.) as well as from the irrigation improvements (system upgrades, tailwater recovery systems, etc.) to surface and subsurface waters of the state of Washington. The impact to streams and rivers that contain federally listed threatened and endangered species is difficult to quantify, but cannot be understated.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

This year is the district's sixth year of CREP focused on assisting landowners along salmonid

waterways with riparian buffers. The district has four contracts totaling 158.7 acres along 7.8 miles of the Yakima River. The program still has an open enrollment. The goal for this year is to continue assistance on the current contracts and service others as they arise.

Livestock/Dairy

We have a great working relationship with our livestock producers. Our Livestock Program has successfully prevented adverse impacts to water quality on ~ 4,000 acres by developing nutrient management plans, planning and designing waste management systems, correcting existing management systems, and our joint efforts with other agencies to inform and educate the producers along with the producers proactive approach to comply with all the regulations have contributed to the continued success of reducing sediment, bacterial, and nutrient loading to the irrigation drains and the Yakima River.

Rill BMP

Despite all of the conversions being installed in SYCD, 40% of fields are still rill irrigated and for one reason or another will remain so. The primary focus of this grant is to provide technical assistance to those landowners to install and implement BMP's that will reduce erosion and runoff from rill irrigation.

Community Collaboration & Coordination

The Lower Yakima Eutrophication study, funded primarily through the Dept. of Ecology, is a 5-year study by the U.S. Geological Survey, South Yakima Conservation District, and Benton Conservation District. The study has launched SYCD into new levels of cooperation and communication with a variety of agencies. So far, by only the second year of this study, the following agencies have contributed supplies, equipment, personnel, site access, or expertise to this project: the U.S Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. EPA, NOAA Fisheries, Yakama Nation, Dept. of Ecology, Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Washington Dept of Transportation, Washington State University, Yakima County, Benton County, Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District, Roza Irrigation District, Columbia Irrigation District, Yakima Basin Joint Board, and the City of Yakima. Because of the increased communication, awareness of a serious

emerging resource issue (aquatic plant growth in the lower Yakima River) has increased substantially in agencies involved in the community.

Information & Education

District Newsletter

Partner with Benton CD for Salmon in the Classroom.

